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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS UBCV LEADER IN HCMC

REF: A) 04 HCMC 1503; B) 04 HCMC 1481

¶1. (SBU) During a December 5 visit with the Ambassador and Consul General, Thich Quang Do, Secretary General of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), thanked the Ambassador for his continued interest in the UBCV and welcomed international pressure calling for greater religious freedom and human rights in Vietnam. He praised the USG designation of Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and said it would be a "strong pressure on Vietnam's leaders" to change their attitude toward religious freedom, although he acknowledged that he has not seen any improvement in the GVN's attitude toward the UBCV since the CPC designation.

¶2. (SBU) Echoing his comments to DRL DAS Dugan in December (Ref B), Thich Quang Do railed against the "dictatorship of communist leaders in Vietnam" and vowed to continue his campaign for a multi-party, democratic system of government. He rejected the idea of a union with the GVN-recognized Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS), which he said is a tool of the GVN. His goal is a UBCV that operates freely and independently of the GVN and is able to use its influence to promote political change in Vietnam. He admitted that UBCV membership in Vietnam has dwindled over the past 30 years to no more than 70 monks. Nonetheless, he claimed that "brave, courageous" monks have been selected to replace UBCV leader Thich Huyen Quang (age 87) and himself (age 77), when necessary.

¶3. (SBU) Thich Quang Do was still unclear of his exact legal status or any charges against him, although he remains under unofficial "pagoda arrest." After his thwarted attempt to visit UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang in November (reftels), he attempted to visit a colleague in another district of HCMC and was again stopped by police. The police have summoned him for questioning several times over the past month, but he has refused to go or to allow the police into his pagoda to speak to him.

¶4. (SBU) Thich Quang Do said he will attempt to visit Thich Huyen Quang in Binh Dinh Province during the Tet New Year in February. He asked the Ambassador to express his support for such a visit to the GVN, although he noted that "the government is very determined to separate us" and that he doubts that the authorities will allow the visit. (Note: We informed the authorities that the Ambassador would meet with Thich Quang Do at his pagoda and met with no interference. End Note.) Thich Quang Do predicted that the police would come again shortly after the Ambassador's visit, as they had after DAS Dugan met with him, but he has no intention of cooperating.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Thich Quang Do's statements reiterated his position of pressing greater religious freedom as a mechanism for advancing political change. He has no desire to cooperate with the communist authorities in any way or to have the UBCV officially recognized by the GVN, unless this can be achieved without conditions. Given his strong anti-communist stance and his open advocacy for rapid political change, the GVN hardline attitude toward him is no surprise. We will continue to monitor the GVN's treatment of Thich Quang Do and any attempts to prevent him from visiting Thich Huyen Quang during Tet. The Ambassador will be expressing his support for the visit to senior GVN officials next week. End Comment.

WINNICK